

Social Skills and Autism:

Using Books in Creative Ways to Reach
and Teach in Early Education

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State of intervention.....

- Social deficits remain the most resistant to intervention efforts
- Include problems with responsiveness and initiations
- Include problems in the functional availability of social responses

ABA: A Definition

- “Applied Behavior Analysis is the science in which tactics derived from the principles of behavior are applied systematically to improve socially significant behavior and experimentation is used to identify the variables responsible for behavior change.”
- Cooper, Heron, & Heward, 2007

ABA

Critical elements of the definition

- Improve *socially significant* behavior
 - What does this mean?
- Identify variables responsible for behavior change



Why is it harder to teach these skills? Diagnostic criteria review

- Impairment in social communication
 - Multiple nonverbal behaviors
 - Peer relationships
 - Sharing enjoyment
 - Social/emotional reciprocity
 - Conversation
 - Reciprocal play/activities



Why else is it harder to teach these skills?

- Multi-element skills
- Involve social judgment as well as skill mastery
 - Judgment is made more difficult by the myriad possibilities that exist in natural interactions



What about play?

- Why is play important?
- How should it be taught?
 - Focus on novelty
 - Focus on flexibility
 - Use examples with personal relevance
 - BOOKS



How are we teaching skills?

- What are the ways in which social skills are taught?
 - Can be taught through many instructional methods in ABA
 - Often taught with multiple methods
 - Usually taught as a packaged intervention
 - Often approached in other ways
 - Social Stories

Some elements of instruction within ABA

1. Specificity of goals
2. Provide prompts effectively
3. Data based decision making



Prompting data provide an index of independence

Data may be collected on the prompts necessary in given contexts

- number
- types
- rate

Ancillary data can serve important functions

- % of times student responded independently

Utility of prompting data

These data can be compared to the assistance provided to a typical learner in that environment

- how discrepant?

These data can guide decisions about supports and about the fading of supports

These data can be a powerful measure of change

DATA

Collect data

- Generalization of skills
- Mastery of new skills
- Social behaviors (initiations, responses)
- Behavioral data
- Engagement
- Play, shared leisure
- Conversation
- INDEPENDENCE



What can data help with?

- Making adjustments in instruction
 - Add reinforcement
 - Change prompts
 - Change goal
- Decide about supports based on data
 - Need for intervention?
 - Need for additional supports?
 - Systematic fading plans

As we consider social skills.....

- Consider social initiations
- Consider social responses
- Consider the acceptability/ease of integration of skills taught
- Consider QUALITY of social initiations and responses
- Consider social comprehension



What elements of social skill training are commonly discussed as clinical challenges?

- Following social rules
- Emitting complex social responses



Understanding social rules and what is expected

- What do people use to teach these skills?
 - Rule cards
 - Feedback on performance
 - Role plays and instructional games
 - Video instruction
 - *Social Stories or similar presentation*
 - *Books*

Rule cards (can be presented in books)

- Helpful in teaching students to follow social rules associated with a particular activity
- A rule card clearly states the behavioral expectations for a specific activity
- Can be textual or picture-based, or both
- Should be brief
 - enhances portability
- Can be used in combination with in vivo behavioral rehearsal

Rules for Library

- Whisper.
- Choose one book to read.
- Raise my hand when I need help.

Rehearsing appropriate behavior

In combination with rule cards

Role plays

Video instruction

Role plays

- Can be used to target nuances of interaction
- Format can be individualized to maximize success
- Can be done with characters, puppets, or people

Video modeling

- Has also been shown to be effective in building a variety of skills
 - Play
 - Conversation
- Probably under-utilized given the empirical support
 - High effort
 - Need to program variability

What else falls under social skills?

- Understanding idioms and slang expressions
- Telling and understanding jokes
- Understanding nonverbal communication
- Perspective taking skills
- Problem solving skills

Often, complex skills require complex instruction

- Multi-modal
- Visual
- Story based
- With rehearsal

Social Stories/Personal Stories

- Often used to teach multi-element skills
- Can also be used to address fear
- Can be used to address challenging behaviors



10 Tips for Developing Your Own Social Stories



Tips

- **1. Observe the current behavior of the child.**
- **2. Write your story in the first person.**
- **3. Explain the current situation or problem.**

- **4. Use positive, affirming statements.**
- **5. Undesirable behavior is addressed only if it may cause harm.**
- **6. Give instruction on the target skill.**

Four types of sentences will typically be used:

- Descriptive
- Perspective
- Directive
- Affirmative

- 7. Use engaging illustrations.



- 8. Read the story frequently
- 9. Social stories are tailored for a particular child.
- 10. Be creative, and have fun!

Some adaptations

- Stories that present INFORMATION
- Stories that give examples
- Stories that script responses
- Stories that illustrate consequences
- Stories that address the perspectives of others



Books have a special place

- Books tell a story
- Books provide visuals
- Books can provide context and examples

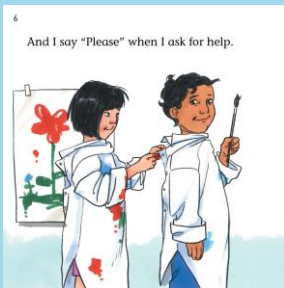
Books provide social information regarding

- Language
- Play
- Other complex social skills

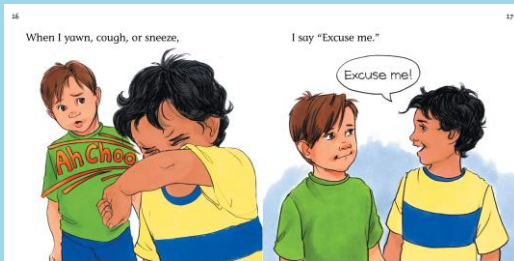
Language

- Using polite language
- Developing conversational volleys
- Comic book conversations

Using polite language



Responding to common occurrences



Developing conversational volleys



Comic Conversations



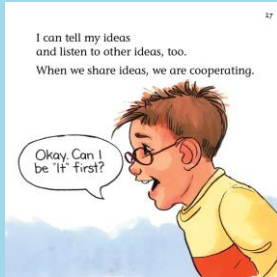
Play

Books can address these obstacles to play

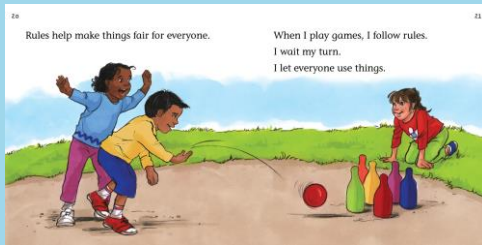
- 1. Repetitive play
- 2. Difficulty learning through observation
- 3. Immature play
- 4. Difficulty with pretend play

Books teach play skills such as

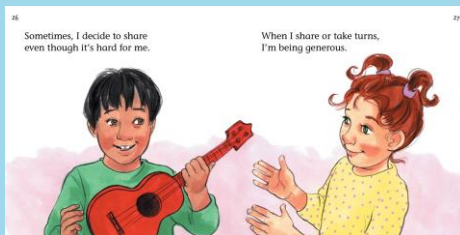
- Cooperation



- Fairness and following rules



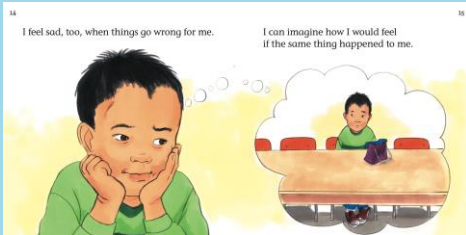
- Sharing and taking turns



Complex skills

- Empathy
- Self-regulation
- Assertiveness
- Behaving appropriately

Perspective-taking and empathy



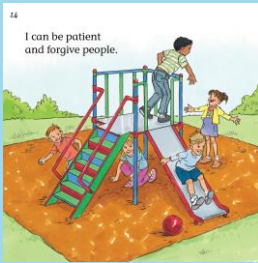
Self-regulation



Assertiveness and communicating needs



Behaving appropriately in social situations



Assessing change

- Objective data
- Subjective data



Another index of change: Social validity

- Are the changes making a meaningful difference in this child's life and in the lives of those he or she encounters?
 - More rewarding interactions
 - Fewer negative interactions
 - More independence
 - Fewer assists from adults
- How can we take data on these issues?

Another thought.....

- Our goal in targeting social skills should be on creating changes that
 - Are socially significant
 - Are meaningful
 - Occur in natural environments
 - Occur in generalized contexts
 - Occur spontaneously



Thank you

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Note

Slides in this presentation include images from *Be Polite and Kind*, *Join In and Play*, *Know and Follow Rules*, *Share and Take Turns*, *Understand and Care*, and *Cool Down and Work Through Anger* from the Learning to Get Along® series by Cheri J. Meiners, M.Ed., copyright © 2017. Used with permission of Free Spirit Publishing. All rights reserved.
